

Constitution of the Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association

Introduction

The purpose of this constitution is to codify the definition, organization, and responsibilities of the Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association (herein referred to as the VPA). The VPA, established in 1998, facilitates the professional and personal development of its members by promoting scholarly learning and social activities as well as providing its members a forum to communicate ideas and advocate for issues. Following the establishment of the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA) in 2016, the VPA is advised and administratively supported by the OPA. The current bylaws delineate the structure and goals for the VPA. The term postdoc will be used throughout the text and will refer to postdoctoral fellows, postdoctoral scholars, and/or postdoctoral researchers.

Article I – Purpose and Function of the VPA.

The VPA has the purpose and function of creating an inclusive community that supports all postdocs at Vanderbilt University and Vanderbilt University Medical Center (herein jointly referred to as ‘Vanderbilt’). The VPA’s purpose is organized into three main categories:

A. Scholarly Learning – This includes inviting outside speakers, organizing workshops, and giving postdocs opportunities to present their work at the annual VPA Symposium.

B. Social Activities – This includes formal and informal social meetings and events for postdocs both at Vanderbilt and outside of the University. These events aim to promote networking opportunities both within the postdoc community as well as between the postdoc community and other Vanderbilt faculty, staff, and students and the broader academic and non-academic community within the south-eastern region of the US.

C. Postdoc Advocacy – This includes the curation of postdoc-relevant resources and information, as well as, providing a forum for postdocs to express questions, concerns, and complaints. While the VPA does not, in and of itself, have the authority to directly alter any Vanderbilt policy, except its own bylaws and governance, the VPA will pass on any information brought forth by the postdoc community to the appropriate channels.

Article II – Membership.

Membership in the VPA will be open to all postdocs as defined by Vanderbilt. As the definition of a postdoc may be different depending on department, training grant status, or other considerations, the final definition will be the responsibility of the OPA. The minimum requirement for membership will be that the scholar must have either a Ph.D. and/or an MD degree and be actively involved in postdoctoral activities at Vanderbilt. The VPA will in no way discriminate based on race, creed, gender, sexual orientation, or any other individual characteristic. The officers of the VPA have a major responsibility in increasing participation and input from all facets of the postdoc community. Vanderbilt faculty, graduate students, and staff who show an interest in helping the VPA are allowed to attend meetings and give input; however, they will not be allowed to vote on any issue that is brought to the VPA. Any item requiring a majority vote will be solely decided by those who are considered a postdoc at Vanderbilt.

Article III – Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee of the VPA consists of up to 10 elected members whose responsibility it is to provide continuity, leadership, and organization to the VPA. The Executive Committee, supported by the OPA, is flexible in how they feel they will implement the goals of the VPA; however, they are responsible for following the mission of the VPA as described in Article I. All members of the Executive Committee are required to regularly attend and contribute to the monthly VPA meetings. All Executive Committee members are elected for a term of 1 year. A call for Executive Committee nominations will go out to all postdocs via the postdoc listserv annually in June. A list of nominees will be sent out for vote to all postdocs via the postdoc listserv annually in July. Ballots will be counted by the outgoing VPA President. If the VPA President is running in the election, ballots will be counted by an outgoing member of the Executive Committee or by a delegate who is not up for election. The candidate(s) with the largest number of votes for each Executive Committee position will be elected. In the event of a tie, a run-off election will be held. If there are vacant positions following the July election, these positions can be filled through the year via an election at the next VPA meeting with a majority vote by all those present at the meeting necessary for election. There is no requirement that all Executive Committee positions be filled in a given year; however the President and Vice President positions must be filled each year.

The term for each Executive Committee member is from August of the election year to the following July. Both incoming and outgoing Executive Committee members will attend the August meeting. The position of President and Vice President can be held for a combined 2 years (i.e., an individual can serve one year as Vice President and then one year as President, or can serve 2 years as either President or Vice President). All other positions can be held up to 2 times (i.e., an individual may serve two terms as the Community Building, Postdoc Advocacy, Scholarly Advancement, or Career Development Chair).

The elected and appointed positions for the VPA are:

1. President (elected) – The President will be responsible for establishing the direction of the VPA, within the guidelines described in Article I, and serving as a liaison between the VPA and the OPA, other Vanderbilt professionals, and community partners. The President must have been a postdoc at Vanderbilt for at least 1 year at the time of their nomination. The President, along with the Vice President and administrators from the OPA, will attend and represent the VPA at the annual National Postdoctoral Association conference.
2. Vice President (elected) – The Vice President will be responsible for guiding and overseeing the committee chairs. The Vice President must have been a postdoc at Vanderbilt for at least 1 year at the time of their nomination. The Vice President, along with the President and administrators from the OPA, will attend and represent the VPA at the annual National Postdoctoral Association conference.
3. Scholarly Advancement Chairs (elected) – The Scholarly Advancement Chair(s) will sit as the chair(s) of the Scholarly Advancement committee (see Article IV for more information on committee responsibilities). Up to two individuals can serve as a Scholarly Advancement Chair.
4. Community Building Chairs (elected) - The Community Building Chair(s) will be responsible for managing the VPA social media platforms and will sit as the chair(s) of the Community Building committee (see Article IV for more information on committee responsibilities). Up to two individuals can serve as a Community Building Chair.

Amended on January 24, 2025

5. Postdoc Advocacy Chairs (elected) - The Postdoc Advocacy Chair(s) will sit as the chair(s) of the Postdoc Advocacy committee (see Article IV for more information on committee responsibilities). Up to two individuals can serve as a Postdoc Chair.

6. Career Development Chairs (elected) – The Career Development Chair(s) will sit as the chair(s) of the Career Development committee (see Article IV for more information on committee responsibilities). Up to two individuals can serve as a Career Development Chair.

The following Executive Committee members are appointed, rather than elected.

7. Senior Advisor (appointed) – The Senior Advisor, who is appointed by the incoming President and Vice President, will be a person with extensive leadership experience in the VPA. Normally, the Senior Advisor will be the outgoing President or Vice President and will be responsible for helping the incoming President and Vice President fulfill the responsibilities of the VPA. If the outgoing President and Vice President are either not willing or not able to serve as the Senior Advisor, the incoming President and Vice President may appoint another individual to serve in this role. The Senior Advisor is required to have once been a Vanderbilt postdoc, but it not required to be a current Vanderbilt postdoc.

8. Executive Partners (appointed) – At the discretion and consensus of the President and Vice President, up to three unelected VPA members who have made or are making significant contributions to the VPA may be appointed, with appointee permission, as VPA Executive Partners. This position recognizes substantial work by a member of the VPA who is not currently serving as part of the elected Executive Committee. This work may serve as a model for new or updated chairs, committees, and/or committee responsibilities. Appointed VPA Executive Partners are retroactively appointed for the academic year.

Article IV – Committees.

There will be four standing committees based on the overall purpose of the VPA as outlined in Article I. Additional subcommittees may be created by the Executive Committee as needed.

A. Committee on Scholarly Advancement – This committee will be primarily responsible for organizing the annual VPA symposium. In addition to the annual symposium, this committee may also organize other invited talks, workshops, and seminars for the postdoc community.

B. Committee on Community Building – This committee will be primarily responsible for planning, organizing, and implementing social-and-networking-focused initiatives and events for the postdoc community (e.g., #VandyExcellence series).

C. Committee on Postdoc Advocacy – This committee will be primarily responsible for planning, organizing, and implementing advocacy-focused initiatives and events for the postdoc community (e.g., Resource Letters). In addition, members of this committee, in partnership with the Executive Committee, will evaluate questions, concerns, and/or complaints brought forth by the postdoc community.

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D. Committee on Career Development – This committee will be primarily responsible for planning, organizing, and implementing professional-development-focused initiatives and events for the postdoc community (e.g., Speak Easy series).

Article V – Meetings.

Meetings shall take place once per month and will be facilitated by the VPA President. Regular scheduling of meetings is encouraged to increase participation and to allow VPA members to plan around meetings. Meeting dates, times, and locations will be posted on the VPA website and the University Calendar. The Executive Committee reserves the right to change the date or time of the monthly meeting to accommodate attendance of the Executive Committee, if necessary. In the event of a change, the new date and time of the monthly meeting will be updated on the VPA website. At the discretion of the Executive Committee, monthly meetings may be combined with the other VPA events such as happy hours, guest speakers, professional development panels, etc. In addition to formal monthly meetings, Executive Committee members and standing committees should meet as needed.

Article VI – Voting.

Any issue brought forth by any member of the VPA must be voted on at the monthly meetings and determined by a majority of the people in attendance at that meeting. In addition, any item voted on by the VPA can be sent out for ratification by the postdoc community via the postdoc listserv. Any item that proposes a non-housekeeping (e.g., grammar, spelling) change to these bylaws must be sent out to vote via the postdoc listserv. For a vote to pass, a majority of respondents must reply in the affirmative (i.e., if 20 votes are received, 11 must be aye votes for the motion to pass).

Article VII – Impeachment of Executive Committee Members.

In the rare event that the postdoc community feels an officer is deemed to be unfit or unable to perform the duties of their position, that officer may be asked to step down. This must be accepted by the director of the OPA and sent out to the postdoc community via the postdoc listserv for a vote. For the impeachment to pass, a majority of respondents must reply in the affirmative (i.e., if 20 votes are received, 11 must be aye votes for the motion to pass).